

BOOK REVIEW

Smith, B.J. 1992. Non-Marine Mollusca. In Houston, W.W.K. (ed). *Zoological Catalogue of Australia*. Australian Government Printing Service, Canberra. Volume 8: 1-405.

The *Zoological Catalogue of Australia* is an ambitious project of the Australian Biological Resources Study, an agency of the commonwealth government located in Canberra. One of the aims of ABRS is to develop a nationwide computer database of all of the plants and animals known to occur in Australia, which for this purpose includes not only the continent itself but also the Australian territories such as Lord Howe I., Norfolk I., Cocos (Keeling) Is., Christmas I., and the Australian Antarctic Territory. All of the information is stored on computer where it can be readily updated and accessed by users. Since many people do not have ready access to the computer network, and even those who do, find a printed copy of the current information to be useful a series of *Zoological Catalogues* is being produced.

Each *Catalogue* follows a standard format using the computerized information. The format and structure of the book are the responsibility of ABRS; the author is responsible for the information itself. When completed, the full set of *Catalogues* will be some 100 volumes. A number of *Catalogues* have already been published. *Non-Marine Mollusca* is the first volume to be published on molluscs, and I am not aware of any additional volumes currently being worked on. The book was written by Dr. Brian J. Smith, well known to MSA members for his active work at the Museum of Victoria and his substantial role in our Society over many years.

There are two aspects to reviewing a book of this nature — the overall concept of the series and the particular book in hand. The project is an ambitious one — to bring together in one place all of the information known about all of the species which live in Australia. At present the available published information is scattered over the literature dating back for 200 years or even more, and cannot be readily obtained except in a very few libraries worldwide. The unpublished information is scattered through museum collections throughout Australia and overseas. Thus it requires a great deal of work for a specialist to develop sufficient information to revise even a small group such as a family or genus. The laudable intention of the *Catalogues* is to bring together the mass of information and make it readily available.

There are inevitably problems with any major project, and a number spring to mind with the *Catalogues*. Our knowledge of the Australian fauna and flora is very uneven. Mammals for example are a relatively small group which can be readily treated, but many phyla have never been studied in Australia. Marine mites were collected last year for the first time at Rottnest Island, W.A. and 70 species, most of them new, were found in 18 days of collecting. The first question about the *Zoological Catalogue* series is whether the limited resources available would have been better utilized if they had been used to develop our knowledge of the systematics of key groups. A second question concerns the format. Using a standard format of information about each species is repetitious. For example

Ponder, Hershler and Jenkins (1989) described the hydrobiid genus *Fonscochlea* with two subgenera and a total of six species. This is the only paper on the group, but the full reference is cited 15 times in a page and a half of text in *Non-Marine Mollusca*. Any work of this nature will unearth a myriad of taxonomic problems which must be addressed — over 300 taxonomic decisions are listed at the back of *Non-Marine Mollusca*, yet the format does not allow the author to state the basis on which each decision is made. This does not allow future workers to evaluate the decisions.

Most of the *Catalogues* deal with a single, distinct taxonomic group such as an order or family. *Non-Marine Mollusca* deviates from this pattern by covering all of the bivalve and gastropod molluscs which live either on land or in freshwater habitats. The distinction between marine species which are not included and the freshwater and terrestrial groups which are is not as simple as it might first appear, as some group have species living in two of the habitats. Dr. Smith has been forced to make decisions on whether to include particular groups. Many species of ellobiids for example live in the high intertidal regions of mangroves or southern estuaries where they are intermediate between marine and terrestrial habitats. A marine biologist would consider ellobiids marine on the basis that they require a marine phase for their reproduction, but Dr. Smith has considered them to be terrestrial for the purposes of this book.

Non-Marine Mollusca is a major contribution to our knowledge of the Australian molluscan fauna. It covers 57 families with over 400 genus names and 1000 species names which are considered to be valid. The book provides a unique and necessary information source for anyone dealing with Australian molluscs. The data presented allow a reader ready access into the published literature on any species. A book such as *Non-Marine Mollusca* which summarizes all of the published information in a particular field inevitably runs the risk of being outdated before it appears in print. In this instance every effort has been made to keep the volume up to date. The cut-off date for publications was 31 December 1990, only just over a year before the book appeared.

Dr. Smith is to be congratulated for the thoroughness with which he has approached this massive task.

F. E. Wells